

Congress Conspiracy And the Callousness of the U. F. Govt. in the Food Front

Admitting, of course, the appalling failure of the U.F. Government in West Bengal during the last six months in the food front, no sensible person finds any reason in the demand raised by the Congress that the U.F. Government should quit its office immediately. This very demand of the present opposition exposes its naked face before the people and shows how jubilant the Congress has become at the disastrous distress of the common men and how enthusiastic it seems to be in playing upon the pitiable plight of the people caused partly by the criminal non-co-operation of the Congress Government at the Centre coupled with the conspiracy of the jotedar-police-combine in collusion with the Congress party itself and partly, of course, by the lack of foresight, if not callousness, of the U.F. Government.

The people of West Bengal are convinced of the fact that whatever might have been the apparent difficulties before the Central Government to alleviate the alarming crisis of food in this state—it is the “petty-politics” that has proved to have polluted the entire atmosphere, the declaration of the Prime Minister and the Union Food Minister notwithstanding. The Central Government has not only refused to maintain its quota as was in the last year during the Congress regime—it has even shamelessly shattered all

hopes of regular supply of its drastically reduced quota to the

Editorial

state. The plea of West Asian crisis to justify the delay of supply can plough no more harvest to its credit at the present juncture. But still the supply is far from regular at a time when the whole state is on the brink of incalculable catastrophe. It is for the Congress leaders to answer why the food situation in India is fast deteriorating and showing no signs of improvement.

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Proletarian Era

ORGAN OF SOCIALIST UNITY CENTRE OF INDIA (Fortnightly)

Editor-in-Chief—Shibdas Ghosh

VOL 1
No. 2

SEPTEMBER 2, 1967
SATURDAY

PRICE
20 P

‘Peoples’ Liberation Pledge Day’ Observed Mammoth Rally at Calcutta on 15th August

(By a Staff Reporter)

This year the August fifteen was observed as a “Peoples’ Liberation Pledge Day” in different states under the auspices of S. U. C.. Innumerable meetings were organised by different units of the party. The most notable among them was that in Raja Subodh Mullick Square, Calcutta held under the chairmanship of Com. Subodh Banerjee and under the auspices of the W.B. State Committee, S.U.C.. Com. Shibdas Ghosh, General Secretary of the Party was the main speaker. It was a largely attended meeting where thousands of people came in processions and demonstrations.

Com. Shibdas Ghosh, the teacher and leader of the party dealt on several important questions confronting peoples’ life. He said, “we have attained political independence no doubt but the question of peoples’ liberation from all sorts of exploitation is yet to be

achieved.” This was because of the fact, he said, that the leadership of the national movement was in the hands of the Indian bourgeoisie whose interest to fight out the Britishers was actuated to establish their own grip over the entire Indian market.

Com. Ghosh said that when the international capitalist market was already crisis-ridden and chaos-discredited, when it was on the verge of collapse it was only natural that Indian capitalism, a part and parcel of the international capitalism, was sure to give birth to unemployment, recession and economic crisis of tremendous magnitude. On the question of the functioning of the U. F. Govt in the state he opined that this Govt. is left with no other alter-

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A view of the mass meeting
addressed by
Com. Shibdas Ghosh



A Reply to the Slanders of C.P.I. on our Vietnam Stand

At a big meeting held by the students in Calcutta on 20th July last, to observe the Vietnam Solidarity Day, the different central students' organisations with left political orientation participated and expressed their respective viewpoints regarding the present Vietnam situation which bears a tremendous significance in the fight for anti-imperialist national liberation struggles and preservation of world peace.

On behalf of the All India Democratic Students' Organisation (D.S.O.), its general secretary Com. Provash Ghosh while expressing unequivocal support to the patriotic Vietnamese people for their just cause of national salvation and national reunification, also deeply felt it necessary to condemn the wanton aggression of the U.S. gangsters, daily and hourly committed on the freedom loving Vietnamese people and severely criticised the pernicious role of the Indian Government for failing in its duty as Chairman of the International Control Commission to condemn the U.S. Govt. for the violation of the essential principles of the 1954 Geneva Agreement. He also mentioned that the present Soviet leaders in spite of their sincere effort to support the Vietnamese cause and rendering much help both military and otherwise, have not properly understood the revolutionary significance of the peace movement and policy of peaceful co-existence which if correctly ascertained can accelerate the revolutionary mass movements throughout the world on an unprecedented scale.

They have also failed to grasp the essential teachings of Comrade Lenin, the great teacher of all the communists of the world, regarding the nature of imperialism and the inevitability of war in the era of imperialism and proletarian dictatorship.

Being utterly confused about these important phenomena of war, peace and peace-

ful co-existence and being played into the hands of the imperialists, who have insidiously created a bogey of nuclear war with a view to pursue the policy of brinkmanship and organise local and partial wars to sustain their war-based economy and prosecute further their neo-colonialist aims, the Soviet leaders have become a victim of their nuclear blackmail, and as such, contrary to their sincere pledges for supporting the anti-imperialist democratic

By

Biplab Sen

movements, are virtually following a weak-kneed policy of appeasement and capitulation to U.S. imperialism and have ultimately failed to offer effective resistance to their (i.e. imperialists') aggressive onslaughts.

Comrade Provash Ghosh's speech condemning such a pacifist attitude of the Soviet Union vis-a-vis U.S. imperialism which has become the chief bulwark of world reaction and most dangerous enemy of the aspiration of peace, freedom and democracy of the toiling masses, evoked a deep discontent among a section of students controlled by the Right Students Federation. A scuffle followed among the students and some Right S.F. volunteers then insanelly obstructed his speech and assaulted some of the leaders of D.S.O.

In another meeting held in Calcutta on the same day organised by Trade Union Federations to observe the Vietnam Day Com. Subodh

Banerjee, the Labour Minister and a leader of S.U.C. spoke in a similar vein and condemned the Soviet Union for its deviation from the revolutionary line. If any real help is to be rendered to the fighting Vietnamese people, stop further bloodshed and put an end to the endless atrocities of the obdurate U.S. gangsters, then it is the responsibility of the Soviet Union to put a positive threat to U.S. imperialism and effectively check its interference in other countries. But instead of discharging this historic task as a leader of international proletarian movement and the chief defender of peace and national liberation, what the Soviet Union is doing at present is submitting to the nuclear blackmail of the 'pentagon' and making concessions after concessions to them, thereby surrendering the interests of the exploited people.

We fail to understand how such political criticism levelled against the present leadership of the Soviet Union who have misconceived the revolutionary essence of Marxism-Leninism and much against their own sincere wishes are objectively frustrating the revolutionary movements waged on many parts of the world, could enrage the advocates of communism in India, the C.P.I. who were rather furious at such criticism and heaped on shameless abuses on our leader and our party without caring a bit to fight politically. In their Bengali organ Kalantar, daily and weekly, and also in their English organ, New Age and Mainstream they have frivolously made use of such unfounded charges like 'Trotskyite in thinking', 'Splitter', 'Anti-Soviet in outlook', 'dogmatists', 'agents of U.S. imperialism' etc. We would like to ask, was it intended to educate us and the toiling millions of India and to prepare the ground of Indian revolution or was it meant simply to cover up their own ideological bankruptcy in this regard?

The leaders of C.P.I. may feel proud to admit that they

have in their long life always kept up the spirit of Sovietism and proletarian internationalism by never judging independently or challenging the stand and politics of the leading communist party that is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. They may think that it is through a sense of blind adherence to authority and complete surrender of independent judgment that the inter-party relationship can be forcefully maintained and the cause of proletarian solidarity can be upheld! But unfortunately we cannot agree on such an outlook, neither does it reflect the essential nature of relationship between the different communist parties, relationship between the leading communist party and others. Such relationship is not formal but dialectical, meaning thereby, that any party however small has an independent role to play and has to contribute in its own way to the international collective leadership. It is on the basis of such dialectical relation that a party does not become 'Trotskyite in nature', 'Splitter' or 'Anti-Soviet', when it criticises the misleading policies of even the leading communist party of the world. It is on the other hand a bounden duty of each party not to hesitate to come into struggle in order to keep the revolutionary line always clear to the masses.

In the light of such an outlook and understanding of the essence of Marxism-Leninism, our party did never suffer from a sense of blind authoritarianism, neither did it fail to discharge its sacred obligations to the cause of the international proletariat. It is in this light that Com. Ghosh and Com. Banerjee commented severely on the erroneous role of the Soviet Union which is dangerously slipping into the line of revisionism causing enormous confusion and difficulties for those who have yet to fight for their revolutionary objectives. Is it not necessary to recall that it was the Soviet

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On our Vietnam stand

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Union who declared that with its tremendous military might and powerful economic system, it stands as the ultimate guarantee of security of all the socialist states. When the pentagon bosses cannot ignore the superiority of Soviet military capabilities how is it that the land of Vietnam is still played a pawn into the hands of U.S. imperialism, the greatest enemy of the mankind. Is not North Vietnam a Socialist State? Urged from the spirit of proletarian internationalism does not the present Soviet leaders feel it a duty that an attack on Vietnam shall be deemed as an attack on the Soviet Union itself! What the Soviet leaders would consider best to do if the present target of U.S. bombardment was not Hanoi or Haiphong but Moscow or Leningrad?

In order to protect revolution and the Soviet State, will the Soviet leaders try to defend the country simply by foiling the bombardment within the territory as the Vietnamese people are doing now or will it adopt effective retaliatory offensive to crush the source of bombardment i.e. the U.S. military Fleets and bases from which the bombardment takes place? How can the Vietnamese people who have gone through a tremendous sacrifice for their salvation put an end to the prolonged bombardment of the U.S. gangsters? How long the Soviet leaders will allow the devilry of U.S. imperialism and not dare to threaten the U.S. aggressors with all its military arsenal and diplomatically isolate them and expose their dark designs to the people of the world? Such was the criticism of Com. Banerjee against the Soviet Union, in order to keep the flame of revolution always burning and to pose a positive threat to the imperialists who pursue a policy of brinkmanship, create local and partial wars and intervene in various ways challenging the freedom and sovereignty of other nations, in order to suit their neo-colonialist aims and objectives. Thus it is not only that the the heroic people of Vietnam can feel secure from the U.S. aggressive designs and see the light of day very soon but actually, thrusting upon the imperialists the policy of peaceful co-existence by virtue of its superior military strength and diplomatic pressure brought to bear upon them along with vigorous peace movements organised throughout the world. The imperialist war economy and

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only for revolutionising the masses of the people for emancipating them from all sorts of exploitation of man by man but also for implementing those very very good laws. A Government that depends solely on the administrative machinery, which we have inherited from the British imperialist rulers of our country for carrying on day to day administration and implementing its policies will be just a replica of the Congress Government. And all talks of re-establishing democratic rights of the people and cleansing the administration will then be nothing more than vote-catching verbiage. A Government which seriously wants to bring in these reforms has got to depend on the masses, their active co-operation and participation and mass movements for translating the reforms into practice. Besides, these simpletons do not also know that the enactment of their very very good laws itself requires mass movements. The society is subject to the law of change. So it changes and with this change the sense of human values, morality, social justice, etc. also changes. A close study of the law of development of society will establish that the sense of values and social justice which in the interest of social progress came into being and gave birth to a particular social order and its corresponding legal and administrative structures, notwithstanding its role to satisfy the contemporary society, degenerated with the change of time to privileges of the reactionary forces and the vested interests. As a result, in the interest of social progress new sense of values and social justice developed within the society. The struggle of this

militarised industries will crack and this will unleash the revolutionary mass movements of oppressed nations and peoples beyond any conceivable limit.

With this end in view Com. Banerjee made a study of the Vietnam situation and appealed to the Soviet leaders to rectify their stand and adopt the correct revolutionary outlook on this crucial issue. One may justifiably ask the leaders of C.P.I. where is the 'splittism', the anti-Sovietism 'reflection of Trotskyite thinking' 'dogmatism' in the speech? Do not these leaders argue almost like a robot and fail to give any independent judgement or see things critically?

new sense of values and social justice born of the necessity to advance social progress with the old sense of values and justice is in fact the struggle to establish the new sense of values and new concept of law and order, new social order and its corresponding legal and administrative institutions. It is only through this struggle that the sense of values and social justice and the concept of law and order based on that sense has undergone continuous changes and has reached the present stage.

It is due to this change that an act which was just and moral at a given time becomes unjust and immoral at a different time. As a result, there always remains a gap, a contradiction, between the new developing sense of values and existing laws. When this contradiction becomes greater, movements start for changing the old laws so as to bring them in conformity with the new social and moral concepts and sense of values. The social impact created by these movements compels the judges to interpret the old laws in the light of new sense of values (this is the reason why we see different and even opposite interpretations of the same law at different times) and force the Government to amend the existing laws. It, thus, follows that if a law, which is not in conformity with the new developing sense of values, morality and social justice, has to be changed, the movement calling for this change has also to be strengthened. What will the Government do in such a case? Will it play an indifferent role? If the people align themselves with the movement should a popular Government remain inactive? I think, the Government must have a creative role. It cannot but help legitimate democratic mass movements necessary for getting new developing social values accepted by the society and corresponding new laws enacted. This Labour Department of our Government is precisely doing. Hence, the question of instigation does not arise.

Whether a particular act is just and morally supportable or not should be judged by its objective. So, strike as such is supportable regardless of its objective—this cannot be a justified stand.

Similarly, every Gherao is supportable no matter whatever its objective is—the logic also is no logic. This is at best a bad logic which can never be accepted. Every case of strike or Gherao must be judged on its own merit. This is the attitude of our Government.

15th August meeting

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native but to act as a Caretaker of the capitalist system. He stressed upon the urgent necessity of not only not interfering into the democratic and legitimate movements of the people but also actively encouraging them on the part of the U.F. Govt. It was, therefore, necessary to give up legalistic attitude and to approach issues on the anvil of legitimacy.

Com. Asutosh Banerjee, Secretary, Calcutta Dist. Committee placed different resolutions welcoming the labour policy of the U. F. Govt. and expressing dissatisfaction with the activities of the departments of education, land and particularly food. Mass songs were organised by D. Y. O which marked the beginning of the meeting.

ASSAM

The Assam State organising Committee of the party observed the day as the "Mass Protest Day". A meeting was held in Nabin Bardalui Hall, Gauhati, which was presided over by Com. Shiddheswar Sarma. Com. Asit Bhattacharya, Secretary of the State Organising Committee of the party was present as the main speaker. Three resolutions on (a) food problem (b) Reorganization of Assam and (c) the demand of industrialisation were adopted which were proposed by Com. Jiban Sarma and supported by Comrades Ketaki Das, Mohan Deka and others.

Set up Immediately the Machinery for all-out State Trading in food grains

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ment even after their continuous rule for two decades both in the states and at the centre. It is for the state Congress leaders to face the criticism of the people why they failed to bring about any land reform worth its name. The dubious role of the Congress party of frustrating all attempts of dehoarding of rice from the Jotedars causing inhuman sufferings of the people and calling upon them in the same breath to oust the U.F. Government, as if for their own interest, has been exposed beyond doubt. The mood of the people of West Bengal has been amply manifesting itself in extending its all-out moral support behind the U.F. Government in spite of its failure and serious lapses here and there and it means no going back to Congress. It will be utter foolishness on the part of the Congress leaders to contemplate to come back simply banking upon this discontent of the people.

This role of the Central Government, State Congress and the jotedar-police combine although alarmingly anti-people but not altogether unexpected. Any man having the slightest political sense should have anticipated this conspiratorial move before hand. It was on the basis of this firm understanding that we put forward certain suggestions before the U.F. committee and the cabinet immediately after its attaining power which went practically unheeded. We had serious apprehension about the practicability of the proposed dehoarding drive, although we were not opposed to it theoretically, which was supposedly aimed at compelling the big rice dealers (i.e. jotedars, black marketeers, smugglers etc) to

sell rice and paddy at a price fixed by the Government when much higher rate was available in the open market.

Our apprehension was further supported by the fact that the jotedars who did not even always co-operate with Congress, their own political party, and created artificial crisis even during the Congress regime in order to fetch maximum profit, were sure to frustrate all such attempts of dehoarding not only from the interest of profit alone but also from their class interest of discrediting the the U.F. Government with the ultimate object of toppling it down.

So it was absolutely childish to appeal to the conscience of these jotedars which is conspicuous by its absence particularly when the question of cash is involved. It was still more ridiculous to expect that the big rice-dealers would voluntarily sell out their stocks to the Government simply because it enhanced the selling price of paddy by five rupees per maund on the average over that which existed during the Congress regime. But however childish and ridiculous it may sound—this was the theme of the food policy adopted by the U.F. Government at that time. And at whose instance? It was no less a party than the C.P.I. (M) which had to its credit of being the proposer of this farcical food policy being blessed with the best support of the C. P. I. We have been forced to state this fact and relate this stark reality as the public opinion has been sought to be made highly confused by the curious propaganda of these parties who seemed to have taken no responsibility of their own

proposed food policy later on as the problem started mounting. We do not, of course, hold any brief for either the Central Government or the State Food Minister Dr. P.C. Ghosh. Rather we are completely in agreement particularly with C.P.I. (M) that the way in which the food problem was approached by the concerned Minister added fuel to the fire. The insidious role of the Central Government has also no parallel. But what we fail to understand is the double-faced approach of these parties whose behaviour inside the cabinet and public utterances outside have been found to be diametrically opposite.

Were not the C.P.I.(M) leaders aware of the clandestine conspiracy of the jotedars and the administrative bureaucrats? Was it very difficult to understand that the policy of compulsory selling of hoarded rice and paddy by jotedars to the U.F. Government at a fixed price was liable to be frustrated in spite of our serious attempts when much higher rate was available in the open market? It was, therefore obvious that even a serious and strong dehoarding drive, a mass movement however strong and militant, admitting its necessity, might not be considered fully effective under the existing conditions to materialise its objective. Naturally, that the prospect of the proposed food policy was quite uncertain and pregnant with the possibilities of leading the whole country to ruination, could not at all be ruled out. If so, why did then the C.P.I. (M) leaders propose and get adopted such an unrealistic policy, in spite of our warnings, which objectively amounted to nothing but betrayal of peoples' cause? And

how is it that it was none but the C.P.I. (M) leaders who later on launched a state-wide campaign holding the Food Minister particularly responsible (although we do not want to minimise his responsibility) for this calamity and posing themselves to be the champions of peoples' cause?

This is a most nasty and and nefarious politics indeed! People should know that any body shouting aloud for peoples cause may not serve that cause always and may even sometimes obstruct that cause.

The essence of our alternative proposal on food which we placed in writing to the U.F. committee and the cabinet (Our General Secretary, Com. Shibdas Ghosh had a special interview with the Chief Minister, Ajoy Mukherjee to discuss about these proposals specifically) before the middle of March '67 was as follows:

(a) To tighten up the cordon around the State of West Bengal so that no rice and paddy could go outside its boundary; (b) to gear up the administrative machinery and enthuse the peoples' committees to set real and effective pressure on the hoarders; (c) to lift the inter-district cordon throughout the state and allow open market as an interim measure for this year and (d) to purchase rice at any price available in the market (which was at that time not higher than Rs. 1.25 per k.g. in Calcutta) by the Government thus creating the necessary stock before the price could rise to Rs. 2.00 per k.g. Thus being pressurised by the all-out dehoarding drive and being offered with the

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Labour Policy of the United Front Government of West Bengal

[This is a summary of the Budget Speech of Com. Subodh Banerjee, Labour Minister, Government of West Bengal. It is for the first time in the history of our country that the Police has been instructed not to interfere in legitimate democratic trade union movements by the workers. Any body who has eyes to see can realise the tremendous significance of this policy of the Labour Department. Besides, the basic outlook towards mass movements, law vis-a vis legitimacy etc, as expressed by Com. Banerjee in his Budget Speech, calls for an all out support by all democratic forces and elements. Our Party under the leadership of our General Secretary, Com. Shibdas Ghosh, has no doubt the lion's share in formulating this progressive labour policy which, of course, is now not the policy of our party alone but the policy of the United Front Government consisting of different parties.—Editor.]

I am fully conscious that our labour policy has been a matter of bitter criticism by a section of the Indian Press and some members of the Opposition Party. I am not opposed to criticism as such; rather I welcome honest criticism. Because, honest criticism helps a man to correct his mistakes and get over his weakness. But to be objective and purposeful this criticism must be based on fact and correct understanding of our labour policy. So I would request my friends not to be carried away by bias and passion but to be guided by logic and proper understanding of our policy.

Basic outlook of the government

The members of the House should know what our basic outlook is otherwise it may be difficult for them to grasp the real significance of our labour policy. I have said times without number and I repeat that ours is a capitalist society based on exploitation. No honest man can deny this truth. Even the Congress, a party of the ruling capitalist class, had to admit this truth at its Bhubaneswar session. So long as capitalist rule will continue in our country, the emancipation of our people

from all sorts of exploitation of man by man will not be possible, nor will their fundamental problems find permanent solution, neither will the doors of uninterrupted social progress open. In order to solve the fundamental problems of the masses of the people permanently and open the doors of uninterrupted social progress, we are to free the society from all sorts of exploitation which calls for not just a change of Government but an end of the present capitalist rule and replacement of the existing capitalist socio-economic-political system by a new system, socialist system, free from all sorts of exploitation. For, any change of Government by itself does not necessarily mean fundamental change of socio-economic-political system in the country. This rapid fundamental qualitative change in social order is called revolution. I know, some of our friends in the Opposition have an aversion for the word, revolution, even though they are found very often to pay lip service to socialism. These gentlemen should know that to talk of socialism and reject the idea of revolution in the same breath is unscien-

tific and the most opportunist way of looking at social phenomenon, a naive device by the capitalist class to exploit popular feelings for socialism in its bid to consolidate and strengthen capitalist rule under the false slogan of building socialist pattern of society.

Limitations of the United Front Government

You all know that our United Front Government has not come into being through revolution. As such, this Government is functioning within the existing capitalist frame-work of society. It, therefore, has to work under the basic limitations of the capitalist society. None should miss this very important point. Then again, it is known to all that under the Indian Constitution the powers of the States are extremely limited. However much we wish, we cannot introduce any and every measure for the well being of our people for so many restrictions imposed on us by the Constitution. Take for instance the labour matter. All matters relating to labour welfare, industrial relations, trade unions, etc, are in the concurrent list of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. Accordingly, we have not free hand in passing legislation on labour matter which, in our opinion, will serve the interests of the working class best. We are to get prior sanction of the President of India in some cases and his assent in all cases before we can either introduce or enforce the laws. There is a Congress Government at the Centre. You can easily guess what the fate of new legislations, that we intend to bring into force, will be at the hands of the Centre. Besides, the Centre can even nullify every bit of these pieces of legislation any time it likes to do so by bringing in Central Acts. Thus, the United Front Government has also to work under these Constitutional limitations. In fine, our Government has, therefore, to function under two limitations—the basic limitations of the

existing capitalist society and the Constitutional limitations—for which it is impossible to bring in fundamental change in the life of our people. I have openly admitted it; I do it over again and shall do it so long as capitalist rule will continue here.

Why then in the Government

If this be the position, what can the United Front Government do in the present set up of the country, why are we, who believe in Marxism-Leninism, in the Government? We definitely owe an explanation to the people. We think that, notwithstanding the fact that radical transformation of the society is impossible in the existing socio-economic-political system, it is quite possible for the United Front Government, even under the above-mentioned two limitations, to introduce reforms which will bring some amount of relief to the people and help to grow and develop legitimate democratic mass movements in the State. I have not got enough time at my disposal to explain all the reforms we would like to introduce but definitely I would fail in my duty if I do not mention just a few of them.

Some new pieces of Legislation

You know that at present there is no security of service of casual labourers and contractors' labourers. They are deprived of even the meagre benefits to which they would have been otherwise entitled under the existing labour laws. Hence, the systems of employing casual labour and contract labour should be abolished in those branches of industries where it is possible to abolish the systems and regulate them in other branches. It is reported that the Central Government is going to introduce a Bill shortly to regulate and/or abolish the contract labour system. So I do not propose to bring any Bill for the same purpose. But in so far as the casual labour system is concerned, the Central Government has no intention to do anything. The previous Congress Government in West Bengal also did nothing in

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'Everything Legal is not always Justified and Moral'

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this regard. But the Labour Department of the United Front Government is bringing the West Bengal Casual Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Bill, 1967, for that purpose. You also know that at present there is no law providing for payment of subsistence allowance to workmen during the period of suspension. During the last twenty years of its rule the Congress Governments at the Centre and in this State did not find it worthwhile to remove this genuine grievance of the workmen. This is but natural; because having spent their entire energy and attention for upholding the interests of their masters, the capitalists, they had no time left to think of poor workers and employees. But the Labour Department of the United Front Government is bringing the West Bengal Payment of Subsistence Allowance Bill, 1967. But since these two Bills require prior sanction of the President before introducing them in the State Legislature, I had sent them to the Union Labour Ministry towards the end of June last for the said sanction. As soon as I would get the sanction I would place them before you for acceptance. You also know that the universities, colleges, schools, research institute, solicitors' firms etc. are not industry as defined in the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947. This is so because of some decisions by the Supreme Court and High Courts. Consequently, in the matter of disputes between the management and workmen of these concerns, the Government cannot intervene. To remove this impasse we are also going to introduce the Industrial Disputes (West Bengal Amendment) Bill, 1967, which has already been published in the Calcutta Gazette. Besides, the present labour laws are back-dated and out-moded. Most of them are the creation of the British rulers of our country. One does not require

much intelligence to understand that these so-called labour laws are in effect anti-labour laws meant to weaken legitimate democratic trade union movement in our country and plunge the workers into litigation. Amendments of these laws corresponding to the new demands of the working class are long over-due. The Congress Government either at the Centre or in the State did not move an inch in this direction. Our Government is already on the move to amend them.

Employees State Insurance Scheme

You all know, there are serious allegations against the E.S.I. Scheme obtaining at present in our State. Insured persons, i.e., labourers do not get medicines at Chemists shops; there is dearth of doctors and nurses at hospitals; panel doctor system is not working to the satisfaction of insured persons; big buildings are being constructed for hospital purpose only to be wasted. We cannot allow such things to continue. The previous Congress Government did practically nothing to remove these just grievances of the workers. There are at present 300 private Chemist shops for supply of medicines to the insured persons. Could not the Congress Government replace them by the Government Chemist shops during the last twelve years to ensure supply of medicines to the workers? The Congress Government during this long period of twelve years opened only two Government Chemist shops whereas during the last few months our Government had opened one such shop and are going to open thirty two more within the coming two or three months. We are waiting for the approval in this regard of the E.S.I. Corporation which we expect to get very soon. We are also reorganising the E.S.I. hospitals. Specialists are being appointed; arrangements for

specialised medical treatment are being made in these hospitals; more nurses are being appointed; bed-strength is being increased; new hospitals are being commissioned. We have already increased the number of beds in the E.S.I. hospital at Sealdah, Calcutta, by 250; two new hospitals, one at Baltikari and the other at Uluberia, Howrah each with 250 beds, are going to be commissioned for use within two to three months; during the Congress regime there was no E.S.I. T.B. hospital in our State; we are going to start one such at Belur very soon if we get the necessary approval from the E.S.I. Corporation. So long the panel doctors could not recommend for ordinary clinical tests of blood, urine, etc. and X-ray. This caused great hardship to the workers. The Congress Government did not move to remove this hardship. We have given that power to the panel doctors. Serious attempts are being made in co-operation with the Associations of medical men in West Bengal to improve the service by the panel doctors. I do not gloat over these achievements, if they are considered achievements at all. This is only a beginning of what we intend to do.

Minimum Wages of Workers

Minimum wages were last fixed or re-fixed in some of the industries in 1958. Thereafter prices have increased many many times. Why then did not the Congress Government think even for once to revise the minimum wages in consonance with the cost of living? Is it not criminal neglect? The law was there; why was it not used and enforced? Perhaps this was not done just to please the employers. But when we assumed the office we did not make any delay in fixing minimum wages. Orders have been issued by the Government to constitute committees and for boards to fix and/or re-fix minimum

wages for employment in 28 industries covering about 46 lakh workers. The committees and/or boards are moving to conclude the proceedings before them without delay. With the co-operation of the parties concerned we expect to declare the minimum wages in the current year.

I know that many Congress members are opposed to raising the minimum wages. Their only stock is the bogey of inflation. But this bogey is raised only when any proposal is made to raise the wages of poor workers. And the reason is obvious. I would request these gentlemen to examine our economy a bit closely. Has not capitalist crisis raised its ugly head? Is not recession hitting hard at our economy? Is not our engineering industry in the grip of crisis? The crisis, which our economy is facing, is the inevitable result of capitalist economy. So long as capitalism will exist there will be capitalist crisis and all attempts to solve the crisis on a permanent basis are historically destined to fail. In the circumstances what can be done at best is to find out some palliatives, some temporary measures just to lessen the acuteness of the crisis. In my considered view increase in the purchasing power of the people by raising wages of workers and introducing land reforms is the only way of blunting the sharpness of the crisis. For, an increase in the purchasing power of the people will raise the effective demand for consumer goods which will create favourable conditions for expansion of consumer goods producing industry. The expansion of consumer goods producing industry will in its wake increase the demand for capital goods. And this increase in the demand for capital goods will naturally free our engineering industry from its present crisis of shri-

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Support Legitimate Democratic Movement of the People

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nkake of market to some extent at least. Thus, our policy of raising the minimum wages is linked with our attempts for expanding the contracted internal market.

About Gherao

Now I would like to say a few words about Gherao, the burning topic of discussion by the vested interests in our country and a powerful section of the press controlled by them. Some of the members of the opposition in course of their speeches have jeered me as a Gherao Minister. I do not mind this 'compliment' of theirs nor do I feel ashamed of being called a Gherao Minister, if I am really so. I will definitely consider myself a despicable insect, if I work as the agent of the exploiting capitalist class. If, on the other hand, I support the legitimate struggle of the exploited people for their just causes, I will move with my head aloft. I whole-heartedly desire that the people of West Bengal unite and fight against social injustice for social justice. Some of the Congress members like Sarbashree Siddharta Sankar Roy, a member of the House and Krishna Kumar Chatterjee, a member of the Lok Sabha, in their overzealousness to parrot the arguments advanced by the big monopolists against Gherao, are reported in newspapers to have said that "the Gheraos, encouraged by the Labour Department in West Bengal remaining in the hands of me, are a prelude to the Red Guard operations now being conducted in China." I fail to understand how responsible and educated persons can utter such nonsense? I may be a supporter of the Red Guard operations but not even the worst enemies of the Congress would say that the Congress and the I.N.T.U.C. leaders are supporters of the Red Guard operations. Why then do the Congress controlled unions and the I.N.T.U.C.-controlled

unions take recourse to Gheraos? Why did the trade union in the Ganges Rope under the leadership of Krishna Kumar Chatterjee resort to Gherao? Why did the tea garden union in Jalpaiguri which is led by Atulya Babu take recourse to the method of Gherao, if it is a prelude to the Red Guard operations? Why do Anando Gopal Mukherjee's union use Gherao in season and out of season as a very convenient method of pressing the demands of the workers belonging to his Unions? To condemn Gherao as such without caring even to examine the causes which lead to such acts on the part of the workers is, in my opinion, to betray one's ignorance of the exact situation or to play the hated role as agents of monopolists. Do you not know that the Gheraos are by and large the inevitable result of unfair labour practice by the management and connected with unjust attacks by employers on the just and legitimate demands or rights of workers?

If you do not know then please have the modesty of knowing the causes of Gheraos before you condemn the method itself. Can you deny that during the last twenty years of the Congress rule, workers, to whichever party they might have belonged, were not treated as force to be reckoned with? As a result, they were suffering quite legitimately from a sense of humiliation. Things have changed now, at best in one State, i.e. in West Bengal, they feel, they have the Labour Department of the United Front Government at their backing in all just and legitimate movements by them. So they are trying to assert themselves. The vociferous advocates of the monopolists, the cynically rabid anti-working class gentlemen, the crusaders against Gherao should do well to remember that every action has an equal but

opposite reaction. So if there is any excess in Gherao movement, which, of course, I do not support, it is the reaction of twenty years' repressive action by the employer class backed by the Congress Government against the workers here. And this Gherao movement is paying dividends also in many a case. It is making settlement of industrial disputes easier and quicker a large number of cases. But the real achievement is that the Central Government has been forced to abandon its pet policy of remaining unmindful of and indifferent to ever-accumulating just grievances of workers and employees. Gherao has, no doubt, removed the uninterrupted two decades' hybernation of the rulers of India. So how can you say that Gherao has failed miserably in upholding any cause of the working class?

I admit, there have been excesses in some cases. Condemn these excesses and the adventurist leadership that encourages such excess. I myself have condemned them. For, in my considered view they deserve to be condemned. Firstly because, such adventurist acts, in place of helping the growth and development of spate of mighty mass movements, create impediments in developing them. Secondly because, they provide opportunities to the enemies of the working class in conducting vile propaganda against working class movement and thereby creating hostility against workers in the minds of the politically unconscious petty bourgeois elements whom we require in our favour for success of workers' struggle. Thirdly because, they will give handle to the Central Government, the reactionary forces in the country, the bureaucracy, and the Police to arm themselves with excuses to resort to repression on the plea of maintenance of law and order. The excesses, the adventurist acts,

therefore, will nip in the bud the possibility of the growth and development of mighty mass movements, including working class movements, and thereby frustrate the progressive labour policy of our Government. I draw the attention of the Trade Union leaders in West Bengal to it. They must check the excesses.

Law and Legitimacy

Some gentlemen demand that the Gherao movement should be suppressed because it is illegal. Firstly, whether Gherao is legal or illegal is yet to be decided. There is nothing in the Indian Penal Code or the Criminal Procedure Code about Gherao. The whole matter is before the Calcutta High Court for its decision. We must wait for its decision. Secondly, you must also remember that Gherao is not a new thing at least in this State. Thirdly, the Government, in my opinion, is not the proper authority to interpret the laws. The judiciary is the proper authority. So how can the Government declare Gherao as a form of movement to be illegal? But these are not my real points. I want to raise a fundamental question. And that is this: "Every student of ethics and jurisprudence knows that everything legal is not always justified and moral. Naturally everything illegal in the eye of the law is not necessarily unjustified, illegitimate and immoral." Progressive men throughout the world have always supported what is legitimate even though it may not be in conformity with the law in force. For instance, you know keeping revolver without a licence is illegal; so also is the killing of persons. But surely no one condemned the revolutionaries in our country who used revolvers without licence to drive away foreign rulers from our country and achieve national independence. Rather each and every freedom-loving person in our country unequi-

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On Food Problem

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then open market price it was only logical that those hoarders who resisted all attempts of selling rice at a fixed price were sure to release their stocks in the open market. In that eventuality it would have been the duty of the Government to purchase rice promptly from the open market by engaging thousands of agents in close co-operation with the peoples committees. We can very well remember that immediately after the formation of the U.F. Government the price of rice in the open market showed a definite decline—since the hoarders were scare about the probable new policy that the U.F. Government was going to adopt. This very incident only proved that the shortage of rice was not real but artificial. There was sufficient stock no doubt—but all underground. Thus the practical means to get this stock released was to offer the price of the open market of that period (we mean the month of March) and to create the necessary stock by the Government. Only under such a situation the Government could not only ensure regular supply to the Statutory Rationing area but could provide reasonable supply to the Modified area as well. Of course it would mean a loss of few crores of rupees of the Government as the Government was required to purchase rice at a higher rate (i.e. the open-market rate) and sell it to the consumers at the ration rate which was much lower no doubt. On this point we suggested to provide subsidy to meet up this loss either by curtailing expenditure of other items or by attempting to get that amount from the Centre or by both. The Central Government which constantly pleaded shortage of rice had no logic not to meet up the deficit of few crores of rupees required for this pur-

pose. In spite of our serious attempts we failed to get this plan accepted by the cabinet. We were sure that only such an interim policy for this year could avert the present crisis and reduce it to a minimum. But it is no use crying over spilt milk. Few months have since then passed, the intensity of the problem has been tremendously magnified only confirming our earlier apprehensions and justifying our warnings. During these months no appreciable stock has been made available to the Government but a huge stock has been allowed to be cornered by the hoarders.

What we intend to emphasise at the present moment is something different. We strongly feel that if this particular point is again lost or overlooked—no body on earth will be able to stop recurrence of crisis of no less magnitude in future. We have again suggested that the Government should arrange for monopoly procurement of the total marketable surplus of the aus crop (which is estimated at 20% of the total production) and set up the machinery, the apparatus for all-out State Trading immediately so that a single moment is not wasted in the next year after harvesting of aman crop. If this machinery for all-out State Trading is not mobilised in the mean time no amount of bumper crop can feed our hungry people as the whole stock will again go underground by the conspiracy of the well-known conspirators of the state. By all-out State Trading we mean both wholesale and retail state Trading. Otherwise only wholesale State Trading in exclusion to the retail (which is still the pet idea of so many big parties of the front including C.P.I.(M) and C. P. I.) will

simply help a wholesaler to convert himself into innumerable retailers thus baffling all our attempts and befooling the U.F. Government. The constituent parties of the United Front should take lesson from the fact that even during the last six months the fixing up a ceiling on the quota of rice that was allowed for free movement by the private agencies could not deter the driving away of huge stocks. Thus we consider the demand for monopoly procurement of the total marketable surplus of aus crop and more specifically the setting up of the machinery for all-out State Trading (as against the wholesale State Trading) immediately to be the central point where all attention should be placed. The distressed and aggrieved people have every right to protest and launch struggle

but they should know what should be their specific demands and whom to press upon. Otherwise scattered, sporadic and isolated expression of their resentment, however justified, would give a handle to those whom they themselves detest by all means. It is high time that the public attention should be focussed on one focal point that is the point of arrangement of all-out State Trading.

Overlooking this vital issue and diverting attention elsewhere will mean wastage of time and energy to the detriment of the peoples cause. "Dharna" or "Hunger Strike" by the Ministers may be deemed to have some temporary effect and seem to be somewhat dazzling but it will simply help deceit the people unless this minimum duty is done forthwith.

Banerjee's Budget Speech

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vocally supported these acts by the revolutionaries, even though such acts were against prevalent laws, on the simple ground that they were ethically just. Therefore, it is wrong to sit in judgment on Gherao with the outlook of a briefless mofussil lawyer who considers the Indian Penal Code or the Criminal Procedure Code as the only storehouse of knowledge and justice obtaining in India. Every movement and for that matter the Gherao also must be judged not from the point of legality or illegality but from the point of legitimacy or illegitimacy, from the point of social justice and moral consideration.

Development of Law

What then should be the attitude of the Government as the custodian of law and order towards such illegal but morally just movements? Should the United Front Government, like Congress Government, rely on guns and bullets, lathis and teargas shells, armed constabulary and mili-

tary personnel and ruthlessly suppress these movements or should it lend support to them in every way possible under the circumstances? It goes without saying that any Government which claims itself to be a popular Government cannot but accept the latter position. Some of our intellectuals ask, "While you are in Government why do you talk of movement? You can very well enact good laws and remove the grievances of the people and thereby make movements unnecessary." One can only sympathise with these intellectuals for their ignorance and simplicity. These persons do not know that even after the enactment of very very good laws safeguarding the rights of the people there will still remain the necessity of conducting mass movements not

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